Autumn Jobs to do in the garden

Autumn is the transition between summer and winter, meteorologically it is the months September – November, and conditions can vary between mellow, warm days of soft sunshine, to mists or rain and gales. It is also a time of harvesting in the fruit and vegetable garden.

Gather fruit for use or to store over the winter. Get a recipe book or search the internet to make pies, crumbles, jams, chutney or freeze them.

Clear crops as they go over, and add them to the compost heap.

Autumn is a good time to start a new compost bin, using some old pallets or a dalek type plastic bin.

Plant bulbs, at a depth twice the size of the bulb. Daffodils and crocus should be planted as soon as possible, tulips in November. Tulips are good for containers. Remember to pot some daffodils for the spring show in March!

Keep dead-heading dahlias and other garden flowers to keep the display going. Later in the season, seedheads on herbaceous plants and grasses should be left on to provide food and shelter for birds and insects, and to provide winter interest in the garden.

Lift dahlia tubers and other tender tubers such as Cannas and Callas, and dry off and store in a frost free place over winter. Alternatively leave them in the ground and cover with a mulch of leaves and compost.

Autumn is a good time to plant trees and hardy shrubs, including fruit trees and bushes. Firm well in and water to settle the roots. Trees should be staked and tied securely to prevent them from blowing over in the wind.

Divide and replant herbaceous perennials if they are getting overgrown or looking tired, saving the best shoots from the outside of the clump, and digging in new compost in the soil to improve it.

Plant autumn onion sets and garlic.
Sow broad beans in November on the plot, or sow in a cold frame or unheated greenhouse if mice are a problem.

Plant or transplant spring cabbages in September/October, 18” apart, or 6” apart for spring greens. Remember to put nets over to protect from pigeons.

Scarify or rake lawns and apply an autumn feed if rain is forecast.

Remove shading from greenhouses as light levels reduce, and clear out greenhouses and polytunnels, cleaning and disinfecting them to prevent pests and diseases from overwintering. If they are to be used for overwintering tender plants, line greenhouses with bubble wrap and get your greenhouse heater ready.

Cut long growth off roses to prevent winter winds from rocking and damaging them. Prune climbing roses, removing the oldest shoots and replacing with new young growths where possible, whilst maintaining the main framework.

Clean and repair guttering, fences and paintwork ready for winter. Put preservative on sheds and fences on dry days.

Sow salads such as mizuna, mustards, lambs lettuce and winter lettuces. In September they can be sown outside in a sunny, sheltered spot, or sown in pots or trays indoors or in a greenhouse for winter use.

Dig in crop remains, compost or manure on veg plots, or spread on the surface of beds in no dig systems.

Damp autumn conditions can encourage slugs and snails. Control them with strategically placed beer traps or go out on damp evenings with a torch to remove them from treasured plants (dahlias and hostas are favourites for them!). Check under pots and trays for slugs hiding during the day, waiting to come out to feed on your seedlings at night.

Lift root crops such as carrots and potatoes, dry them off and store in a frost and rodent-free place. Parsnips and leeks can be left in the ground until you need them.

A project to do with the children is to build a bug hotel using an old pallet stuffed with leaves, crunched up newspaper, pine cones, canes and twigs, to give mini beasts a place to hibernate. You could give it an appropriate name (eg Buggingham Palace!).

Clean out ponds, leaving any materials removed beside the pond for a couple of days to enable pond creatures to find their way back into the water.

Clear fallen leaves from paths and lawns, but leave them on beds and borders to act as a mulch and soil improver. Small quantities can be added to compost heaps/bins, while large quantities can be stacked separately in a heap or a bin made of 4 stakes and some wire mesh to make leaf mould. They can even be put in a black plastic bags with some holes cut in it, and left for a year (keep moist).